

Nature conservation: One in six European mammals threatened with extinction shows assessment by the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Published on the occasion of World Biodiversity Day an assessment of all European mammals shows that nearly one in every six mammal species is threatened with extinction. The report, commissioned by the European Commission and carried out by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), demonstrates that population trends are alarming: a quarter (27%) of all mammals had declining populations and a further 33% had an unknown population trend. Only 8% were identified as increasing, including the European bison. The report also highlights successful recoveries resulting from targeted conservation measures and shows that to reverse the observed decline such measures need to be integrated into all European Union policies on the use of natural resources.

Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: 'The report highlights the significant challenge European governments face in keeping their promise to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. It is clear that if we are to protect Europe's species, it is of utmost importance to implement fully the Habitats Directive, which covers nearly all the mammals now under threat'.

World Conservation Union (IUCN) Director-General Julia Marton-Lefèvre said: "This new assessment proves that many European mammals are declining at an alarming rate. However, we still have the power to reverse that trend, as clearly shown by the case of the European bison which was brought back from extinction."

Nearly one in six European mammals are threatened with extinction

Europe contains a rich diversity of mammals ranging from the small and rarely seen nocturnal shrews and voles to the elusive brown bear. But the results of the European Mammal Assessment are clear: some 15%, or almost one sixth, of mammals are threatened in Europe. The situation of marine mammals is even bleaker: some 22% are classified as threatened with extinction. The true number is likely to be even higher, as almost 44% were classified as *Data Deficient* due to missing information. By comparison, 13% of European birds are threatened.

The main threats to European mammals are habitat degradation and loss, such as deforestation or wetland drainage, followed by pollution and over-harvesting. For marine species, pollution and accidental mortality from fisheries by-catch or ship collisions are the main risks. These threats are most severe in the enclosed seas of the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Within the European Union six species have been classified as *Critically Endangered*. The most threatened category includes the Arctic fox and the European mink, which both have very small and declining populations. Only 150 Iberian Lynxes survive today and the Mediterranean Monk Seal population has decreased to an estimated 350-450 individuals.

Europe is one of the best studied regions of the world, but no overall view of the conservation status of mammals across the continent had been compiled. To fill that gap, the European Union commissioned the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to assess all mammals of continental Europe against the IUCN Red List criteria in order to identify Europe's most threatened mammals and help set conservation priorities. The assessment showed that Europe's mountains and the Balkan Peninsula are home to the greatest diversity of different species. This wealth of biodiversity forms an arc which extends from the Pyrenees through the Alps towards the Carpathians and Rhodopes in South Eastern Europe. The greatest concentration of threatened species was found in Bulgaria.

To reverse the decline of Europe's mammals the study recommends urgent implementation of European Union nature conservation policies, development of action plans for threatened species, and integration of nature conservation into European Union policies on the use of natural resources.

The European Mammal Assessment is publicly available at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/ema/>

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is available at:

<http://www.redlist.org>

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Regional Office for Europe

<http://www.iucneurope.org>

The Countdown 2010 Initiative

<http://www.countdown2010.net>